

## Children engaged in hazardous jobs

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

Hedayet Ullah, all covered in grease, soot and black smoke of vehicle emissions arrived at his work place, an auto repair shop beside the shooting club in Gulshan 1, at 8:30 am and probably would not leave till 9:00 at night.

He spends the whole day cleaning heavy parts of vehicle engines and sometimes painting car bodies. And like other thatched shops where proper equipment to remove the metal rim from the rubber tyre is not available, Hedayet has to use a heavy sledgehammer and another tool to manually fix any leakage.

A large number of children like Hedayet from poor families in the city are engaged in hazardous jobs like working as trainee mechanical hands in auto repair shops.

There are around 55 to 60 makeshift automobile workshops in Gulshan 1 and 2 where children, between five and 19 years, work to feed themselves and their families.

The child workers said a very few shop owners pay the trainees a lump sum amount of Tk 50 to 100 a week while others pay them nothing.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), there are 430 types of child labour of which 67 are most hazardous.

Unicef identified the jobs of automobile workshop workers, battery recharging shop workers, blacksmith, stone crushing, car painting/metal furniture spray painting workers, smuggling, drugs selling and sex workers as very hazardous.

The hazards, associated with these dangerous activities include: exposure to flames, working with

electricity, exposure to harmful chemical substances, fumes and organic dust, high-speed machinery, sharp equipment and more.

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This correspondent talked to 10 trainee auto mechanics. Six of them

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said they had been forced to join the work by their parents to contribute to the family while the rest four said they had joined at their free will.

Twelve-year-old Shyamol said his father put him to work in a garage for cleaning car parts for Tk 50 to 60 a month. Three other children also work there. They are always afraid of the owner who is ill-tempered. If they are not attentive, the owner beats them up, said

another child.

Shyamol works for almost 10 to 12 hours a day. "I feel bad when I see other children are going to school while I am repairing a car tyre."

The number of such child labourers is increasing day by day, according to local NGOs. Around 60 percent of more than four lakh street children in Dhaka are leading a vulnerable life as they are compelled to indulge in risky jobs or antisocial activities.

"It takes four to five years for anyone to become a trained and experienced mechanic," said Hedayet Ullah, 19, at an auto repair shop beside the shooting club in Gulshan.

"In the initial two years of working, you will only watch how car engines are fixed, tyre leaks mended and dents on the vehicle body fixed. No wages will be given at that time because that is the learning phase," he added.

Hedayet's co-worker Akmal Mia said: "If you are smart, the learning time might be two to two and a half years to become a car mechanic. The timing of work is fixed by the garage owners, usually from 9:00 in the morning to 9:00 at night."

Akmal Ahmed who owns an auto repair shop at Badda, said: "For those who cannot afford to join the schools offering vocational training, this is the perfect place to learn. We cannot offer money in the beginning but as they become expert, either we hire them or refer to the bigger vehicle repair shops in Tejaon to employ them."

Other shop owners said instead of becoming accomplices of local hooligans and getting involved in crime, at least the children are doing something worthwhile at these shops.



Children at work in a garage in Gulshan 1.

### city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

*"We did not have specific information about their presence, but we had information from a reliable source that two to three members of JMB's Majlish-e-Shura are present there. The two may or may not be among them."*

-- Abdul Qayyum

Inspector of General

Said at a press conference when asked if law enforcers had any information that Bengla Bhai or Abdur Rahman was attending a meeting at Poradaha in Kushiha where joint forces raided around four villages looking for them all day long, on Thursday.  
Source: The Daily Star

*"I will not say anything about it, as the matter is related to the related High Court's directive."*

-- SM Zakaria

Election Commissioner

Told reporters when asked whether the field level workers were continuing their work to prepare a new voter list ignoring the High Court directive, on Wednesday.  
Source: The Daily Star

*"The campaign against polythene bags was successful for a few years but the grip is gradually loosening now."*

-- Rizwana Hasan

Director, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association

Told Star City about the resurgence of polythene bags in the markets, on Tuesday.  
Source: The Daily Star

*"Open toilets and dumping grounds compel us not to look out of the window till the train passes Tongi."*

-- Rokonuddin

A train passenger

Said about his discomfort in travelling by train from Dhaka, on Monday.  
Source: The Daily Star

*"Letters have been sent to BNP leaders all over the country to keep an eye so that nobody's name is omitted from the voter list."*

-- Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan

LGRD Minister

Said at a programme on the occasion of Zia's birth anniversary, on Thursday.  
Source: Prothom Alo

*"I am a part of the ruling party, that's why I have taken a government property. If you want to write about it, go ahead."*

-- Ishak Ali

Local Jubodal leader in Dhunat, Bogra

Said to local reporters about his involvement in demolishing a government building, on Tuesday.  
Source: Prothom Alo

### BOTTLED WATER PROJECT OF WASA

## Production put off till June 2006

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

The bottled water project by Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) originally scheduled to commence production in January, may not begin before June 2006.

Wasa sources said that only 60 percent construction of the factory building has been done and the rest will not be completed before March.

The then Managing Director of Wasa, ANH Akhter Hossain in

a Star City report on June 26 said the plant would go for production on January 2006, but present unforeseen circumstances have put off production by another five months.

"The imported water plant machinery and plastic bottle manufacturing unit will not arrive before March and it will take minimum of two months to set the equipment up," said a source in Wasa.

The source also said that after the plant has been

installed, it would be commercially leased out and floating of tenders and the entire procedure involved would take at least two more months.

The project was initiated during the tenure of the previous government but Wasa took three years to complete the tender process.

It was initially decided that a mineral water plant be set up at the Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant. In March 2004, the LGRD ministry sug-

gested setting up of both water and bottle manufacturing plants.

Later Wasa decided to set up both the plants on its own land and finally selected Mirpur for the purpose.

In May 2005 Wasa awarded the plant setting-up contract to Paragon Enterprise Limited, and officials of this enterprise said the late handing over of the land was reason for the delay.

"After the land was handed over we had to fill and pile the

wetland and then start the construction," said Azharul Islam, executive director, Paragon Enterprise Limited.

The Tk 13-crore plant will produce 10,000 litres of water an hour when it starts operating, said another Wasa official adding that they would provide customers with pure drinking water at the cheapest possible price.

After the completion of the project the Wasa will commercially market bottled mineral

water.

"We will open the Letter of Credit (LC) this month so that the machinery would arrive before March. We are confident that we would go into production by this April," said Mahfuzur Rahman Public Relations Officer (PRO), Wasa, but did not show any specific reason for the delay.

Wasa officials said the price of Wasa bottled water would be at least 30 percent lower than that of other companies.



## Security tightened at female dorms of Dhaka University

WAHIDA MITU

Dhaka University authorities have taken strict security measures in four female dormitories of the university, more than a month after a bomb threat.

A group of Islamist militants sent a letter to the DU authorities in the first week of December last year, threatening to blow up Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree Hall, Fazilatunnessa Mujib Hall, Rokeya Hall and Shamsunnahar Hall.

The gate adjacent to Nilkhet-Azampur road, the only entrance to Bangladesh-Kuwait Maitree (BKM) Hall and Fazilatunnessa Mujib (FM) Hall areas, has been

closed to the visitors as part of the tightened security measures.

Security guards are checking the students' bags and identity cards (ID) at the entrance.

Some students however allege that the authorities are doing it in excess. The hall authorities hardly permit entry of guardians beyond the visiting hours. As a result, the resident students, their relatives and parents feel embarrassed, as they have no place to wait outside.

"My father came to meet me a few days ago. I couldn't offer him a place to sit. There is a guestroom in our hall for the visitors, but now the authorities prevent relatives

from entering the hall except in the visiting hours," said a student of Kuwait-Maitree Hall.

"We welcome the authorities for their steps to ensure security, but they should not do excesses in the name of security," she added.

When asked, the hall provost denied the allegation and said: "We allow parents and other senior guardians in the guestroom any time. We also allow non-resident female students and female students from other halls, if a resident student identifies her as her guest."

The provost also said she took all the security measures after discussing with the resident students in gen-

eral meetings.

However, some students expressed satisfaction over the security measures. "After every event the hall authorities take security steps and this time the measures are tolerable. We want its continuation," said Tarana Yasmin, a resident student of Kuwait-Maitree hall.

Resident students of Rokeya Hall alleged that the hall authorities do not permit the entry of the students of other dormitories. "Our friends from other halls of the university cannot come here to meet us," a student said preferring anonymity.

When contacted, the provost of Rokeya Hall said: "As students from other halls and

non-resident students usually break discipline by gossiping in the hall rooms instead of canteen and common room, we restricted their access."

A few months back the authorities of Shamsunnahar Hall imposed a restriction on the entry of students from other halls. But now they permit them to enter the hall after fulfilling some formalities, said a resident student of Shamsunnahar Hall.

DU Proctor Dr AK Firoz said they want to ensure foolproof security on the campus, but will look into the matter if there is any incident of harassment.